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PHILOSOPHY AND INDUSTRIAL LIFE.

AMONG the varied activities of men there are two which are often brought into contrast with one another. These are, on the one hand, the practical work, which is embodied mainly in industrial products, and, on the other hand, such purely intellectual labor as is represented by speculative philosophy. The two appear at times as if they came into contact, but are more commonly regarded as so divergent that they can scarcely have any interest in common. It is, therefore, for the sake of both, an important inquiry which seeks to determine the real relation in which they stand to each other. That relation may be conceived either in its empirical aspect as a matter of historical fact, or in its logical aspect as necessitated by rational law. In the former aspect there is one fact which it is mainly important to notice, as it counteracts a common prejudice on the subject. There is a wide-spread impression that industrial work is so incompatible with philosophical speculation, that the two appear almost in inverse proportion to one another. But the impression is founded on a very superficial reading of history. It is to a large extent a misinterpretation of facts which have their familiar origin in the essential limitations of human power. One obvious result of this limitation is found in the fact, that, if human energy is largely discharged in one direction, it must to a corresponding extent be withdrawn from others. But beyond this inevitable effect of human limitation, there is nothing in national history to countenance the impression that industrial activity has, in the experience of any community, been found to be incompatible with the philosophical spirit. So far is this from being the case, the real fact is

that philosophy has found a home mainly among those communities and those sections of a community, in which industrial enterprise has to some extent expelled the spirit and the ideals of a purely militant society.

It is not difficult to explain this fact. In the relation of philosophy to industrial life, as in the relations of social phenomena in general, each may be viewed as alternately cause and effect: in other words, the dominating category is that of reciprocal action. Taking philosophy, in the first instance, as an effect, it is obvious that industrial activity, and industrial activity alone, provides the external conditions that are necessary for the development of the philosophical spirit. A militant society, almost of necessity, absorbs the entire energy of its members in the struggle for existence. For either it must depend on the precarious supply to be obtained by plundering its neighbors, or it must wring from nature the means of subsistence by such primitive industries as the militant condition allows, and then protect these from the rapacity of neighbors that live by plunder. In either case the mere maintenance of society will be its supreme—its almost exclusive—concern. On the other hand, an industrial society, to the extent to which industrialism supplants military enterprise, tends to create that accumulated wealth, which relieves it from the incessant pressure of the struggle for existence, and enables it to set apart some of its members for that leisurely reflexion on the meaning of life, of which the products are philosophy and science and art. It may be added that the industrial spirit encourages also those internal conditions of thought and sentiment, which are favorable to philosophical activity.

If, on the other hand, philosophy is viewed as a cause, then it is obvious that, not only in its general influence upon the human mind, but also by the special character of that influence, it is as favorable to the industrial spirit as this is to it. For not only does the general habit of reflexion tend to cultivate those peaceful sentiments which are essential to the success and the continuance of industrial activity, but this activity is rendered all the more successful especially by reflecting on the ultimate significance and end of existence, inasmuch as the conception of that end must give a clearer

direction to all the aims of human exertion, and therefore to the special aims of industrial life.

We are thus, however, already carried beyond a purely empirical view of the relation between philosophy and industrial work : for not only do we thus see how industrialism is not inimical to philosophy, but we see philosophy repaying industrialism for its friendly services by opening wider and clearer views of its aims, giving to these something better than the mere impulses of the instinctive struggle for existence, directing them to their proper end by the guidance of reason. Accordingly we are led to inquire, what is the result of turning the light of philosophical reflexion upon the aims of industrial life, or, in other words, what is the view of those aims, which such reflexion suggests. Philosophy, being necessarily occupied with the ultimate meaning and purpose of existence, must, when reflected upon industrial life, endeavor to grasp the supreme end to which the particular aims of industrialism are subservient, as well as the means by which industrialism endeavors to reach that end.

I.

The end of industrial life. It ought to go without saying, that the supreme end of industrial activity must be identical with that of all activity : and yet the fact is one that is but imperfectly recognised, or its significance is but imperfectly understood. The fact is, indeed, strikingly indicated by the common language of industrial life, which has been adopted by economical science. Prevalent phraseology describes industrial life as occupied with the production and distribution of wealth, and this accordingly is said to form the subject of scientific economics : but even scientific explanations of this language are often extremely imperfect, when they are not misleading. The term wealth, by its very etymology, indicates that it properly denotes the condition of weal, of well-being. It is true that, in its ordinary use it is applied rather to external things than to an internal state, and we must of course continue to accept established usage as the criterion of propriety in the application of the term. But if the term is not to be abused by a vagueness which

empties it of all serviceable significance, it must be applied to those phenomena which form the external conditions of human weal.

This is more or less clearly implied in all the scientific definitions of wealth. For in every such definition it is recognised with but slight variation of language, that, in order to make any article a factor of wealth, it must possess the attribute which is technically known as utility : and utility is always explained to mean the adaptation of the article to satisfy some human want. The very terminology thus adopted, however, shows that the industrial aspect of wealth inevitably runs over into the ethical, and that nothing but an incomplete analysis can countenance the practice, which has been common in the political economy of the earlier part of this century, —the practice of drawing an absolute line of demarcation between economical and ethical problems. Again and again we are told in the literature of this period, that the science of economics can view things merely on the side of their utility, and that their utility means merely that they can satisfy any of the wants of men. Many articles, it is admitted, are applied to the gratification of petty vanities or even gross animal passions. It is regretted that men should indulge degrading wants. Economical science does not deny the moral aspect of things, or under-estimate its importance. It simply asserts that the economical is not the moral aspect. It maintains that, as long as men cultivate degrading wants, they will seek the objects by which these are gratified, they will give their labor and other valuable things in exchange for those objects, and such objects will thus, by their utility, possess economical value.

All this reasoning, it required no very stoical morality to avoid. The moralists of the utilitarian school were sufficient to have taught the utilitarian economists a nobler, as well as a more philosophical, conception of utility. For the utilitarian moralists, while giving to utility a definition essentially identical with that of the economists, interpret the definition with a truer, because a far wider, view of its implications. To the moralist, as to the economist, utility is the power of affording gratification : but in general the moralist refuses to admit that the meaning of this definition can be fully understood without taking into view the nature of the gratifications that are

sought. Even for the individual an action cannot be said to have real utility merely because it gives gratification for the moment. The real gratification of any human being must be the gratification derived from life as a whole : and the utility, that is, the goodness, of an action, even for the individual agent, can therefore never be calculated without reference to its motives and consequences. Accordingly, nearly all utilitarian moralists, from Epicurus down to John Stuart Mill, have maintained that our happiness is derived, not so much from the feelings of the moment, as from the fact that

“ We look before and after,
And pine for what is not.”

But if this is the case even when the question is limited to the individual, it must be much more obvious when the view is extended to society. Not only is it absurd to seek the happiness of certain members or classes without regard to the rest, but the genuine happiness of every community must imply some security for its permanence. In general also utilitarian moralists have endeavored to show,—with what success, need not be discussed,—that the happiness of the individual, when completely analysed, must be identical with that of society.

These considerations have not indeed been overlooked wholly by economical writers, or overlooked by them all : but it is rare to find, among the predominant school of economists in the earlier half of this century, a clear and steady recognition of the scientific truth, that the utility, upon which the economical value of a commodity depends, must involve implications essentially similar to those which characterise the utility that is supposed to determine the moral value of an action. If the utility, which makes an action morally good, must calculate the happiness of an individual's whole life, and even the happiness of the whole community to which he belongs, then, by parity of reasoning, the utility, which ranks a commodity among the economical goods of mankind, which makes a commodity a real constituent of wealth, must point to a happiness of the same wide range. It is the oversight of this reasoning that originates many shallow popular illusions with regard to the economical value of reckless extravagance and vicious indulgences, which stimulate the

production of certain commodities, and thus enable the producers to obtain from the wages of their labor the means of subsistence. It is true that it has become a common-place among economical writers to distinguish productive and unproductive consumption : but the familiarity of this distinction has not prevented even economists from overlooking at times its full significance. Consumption very often gets the credit of being productive if it results in any material product which is exchangeable in the markets of the world, even though the product may be adapted, while giving momentary pleasure, to impair the general happiness and productive power of its consumers, or even though it may be adapted, like the instruments of warfare, to destroy wealth. Thus the impression is gathered from some economical treatises, that a million gallons of whisky may be entered upon the inventory of a nation's wealth equally with a million barrels of flour, or that a million rifles make up the genuine wealth of the world equally with a million reaping machines. Unless this distinction is maintained in all its purport, not only is a color given to the illusions of vulgar thought, but there is no escape from the extravagant theory of the "Fable of the Bees." The very extravagance of this famous book has led some critics—I think, without reason—to look upon it as a bit of irony : but the essentially comical character of its extravagance makes it, whether intentionally or not, an ironical *reductio ad absurdum* of the idea that real wealth can be made up of articles which are inimical to the real, that is, the moral, well being of a community.

These remarks have been based designedly on the utilitarian interpretation of the moral life, not from any desire to estimate the value of that interpretation, but simply because the language of utilitarian ethics is so naturally suggested by that of economical writers. The whole reasoning of these remarks, however, is independent on any peculiar ethical theory : and probably most thinkers would acknowledge that the reasoning gains force by the abandonment of utilitarianism. It thus appears that, on any ethical theory, philosophy will not allow an absolute separation of the industrial from the moral life of man, and that the wealth, which industry is occupied in producing, can, if genuine, be merely *the sum*

of those external or material conditions which are essential and favorable to morality.

II.

The method or means of attaining the end of industrial life. Wealth can be accumulated only in proportion as it is produced at the least possible cost, and distributed with the least possible waste : that is to say, the economical production and distribution of wealth form the method or means of attaining the end of industrial life. Accordingly the production and distribution of wealth form also the main subjects of economical science. Here again, however, as in the definition of wealth itself, the spirit of philosophy may fairly be called in to enlarge the conceptions with which the science of economy deals.

Thus, to begin with, production and distribution are very often separated with that sharpness of discrimination which is engendered and sometimes even enforced by the limitation of view characteristic of scientific specialism, but which is apt to be blurred, if not obliterated, in the vaster sweep of the philosophical mind, seeking the unification of all knowledge. It is impossible to explain production satisfactorily, as wholly independent of distribution. For, apart from other considerations, if an undue proportion of the wealth produced in any community finds its way into the hands of unproductive consumers, then the productive power of the community is crippled, not only by the want of capital, but also by the fact that a large proportion of the productive laborers are poorly fed, poorly clad, poorly housed, poorly provided with the means of moral and intellectual training, so that their energy as producers is seriously impaired. This has always been in the past, and continues to be at present, the chronic condition even of the most advanced industrial nations, and it forms one of the principal causes which prevent the world from producing the wealth that it might otherwise enjoy. Even, therefore, for the production of wealth, a community cannot be indifferent to its distribution ; and, as a matter of fact, the undefined usages, as well as the definite laws, of all countries, have been largely concerned with the distribution of their wealth.

It will probably be allowed that the general thought, of which such social regulations are an outgrowth, is the idea of a right which a man acquires over any product of nature, when by his labor he communicates to it a utility which without his labor it would not have possessed. Even in communities of the rudest militant type, regulated mainly by

"The simple plan,
That they should take who have the power,
And they should keep who can,"

there appears at times a dim conception of the right which a man acquires to the fruits of his labor, though the conception is perversely applied to labor which deprives another of the same right. At all events it is this right which civilised jurisprudence has endeavored to bring into ever clearer recognition: and what philosophy has to demand of economics is, that it shall not inculcate any industrial arrangement of society which is incompatible with the full recognition of this right. For philosophy, as the unification of all knowledge, the harmony of all the sciences, cannot admit that to be true in one science which is untrue in another. Accordingly the economical aims of society cannot be philosophically represented as out of harmony with the aims which are posited by jurisprudence and ethics: in other words, the production of the aggregate wealth of any community cannot be conceived to be independent on its equitable distribution among the individual members.

Accordingly it becomes an economical problem to devise a method by which the aggregate wealth produced in a community shall be equitably distributed among the producers, even though economical science may state the problem as seeking a method by which the aggregate wealth produced may be so distributed as most efficiently to promote further production. In the solution of the problem the economical theories predominant in the early part of this century, went almost exclusively in the direction of abolishing all restrictions upon individual freedom: and the function of the State in relation to industrial life was confined to restraining individuals from interfering with the freedom of each other. It is not difficult to trace the origin of this movement. It was but a ripple

on a great wave of thought and life, which was already flowing in full tide towards the middle of last century, and before the century closed had, in the irresistible sweep of the American and European revolutions, borne down the barriers erected to stem its progress. The fundamental idea of this movement was an interpretation of the old Stoical concept of *the state of nature*. According to this interpretation man, as well as every other being, is conceived as adapted, by the very constitution of his nature, to promote his own welfare ; so that to secure that welfare nothing is required but to allow his nature free play by emancipating it from the artificial restrictions by which its full development is impeded. It is not necessary to illustrate the application of this concept, for example, to the education of the individual in the startling novelties of Rousseau's "Emile," and to the constitution of society in the equally startling paradoxes of his essay on the origin of inequalities among men. The great literary enthusiasm, which emancipated literature from the fetters of a rigid and often frigid classicism by the outburst of a fervid and sometimes eccentric romanticism, was an inspiration of the same movement.

It was the ideas of this movement applied to industrial life that originated the demand for freedom of trade ; and in view of the industrial condition of the world at the time such a demand was not only intelligible, but irresistible by any rational thought. In some countries, such as France, it is difficult to understand how industry of any kind continued to survive under the innumerable oppressions of a mediæval thraldom which seem as if they had been designed to crush it out of existence. But even in Great Britain, though its comparative political freedom made it the admiration of the continental liberals, industrial life was fettered by restrictions which not only checked the manufacturing and mercantile enterprise of its own people, but originated the calamitous differences with its colonies, and much of the calamitous discontent of Ireland.

But Rousseau's conception of a state of nature, which logically leads to the abolition of all restrictions upon the industrial freedom of the individual, is philosophically as untenable as the opposite conception of Hobbes, which, by a characteristic logic, associated

itself with the most extreme absolutism in ecclesiastical as well as in political organisation. The truth is, as has been shown in many a literary phenomenon from Proudhon to Count Tolstoi, the theory of Rousseau cannot stop short of an absolute nihilism or anarchism, which denies the right of any social authority to restrict the action of individuals. Consequently, in its application to industrial life, demanding, as it does, an unlimited industrial freedom, the theory becomes unthinkable, that is, self-contradictory, under a complete analysis. For, while assuming that, if men are left to their natural impulses unchecked by any artificial restrictions of society, they will certainly seek and find their true welfare, it stands face to face with the fact, that unrestricted liberty of industrial competition, instead of bringing about an effective, peaceful co-operation among industrial workers, has actually realised a *bellum omnium contra omnes*, which seems to illustrate the theory of Hobbes rather than that of Rousseau with regard to the natural state of man. Now, without attempting even to hint at the manifold problems which this subject suggests, it is obvious that, under all its aspects, the individual must be treated, not as a solitary, but as essentially a member of society, forced into innumerable relations with his fellow-men. This is peculiarly evident in industrial life. Here we see in its most striking forms that division of labor which, from the time of Plato, has been recognised as the essential factor of political organisation. But the result of dividing industrial labor among the different members of the community is, that, as a rule, no individual produces all the necessities even of his own existence, and that therefore he would be left in partial destitution if he could not supply his wants from the surplus products of the labor of others in exchange for the surplus products of his own. The complications of this industrial exchange, with the complications of divided labor from which they arise, form a familiar commonplace in social science, but a commonplace which it is extremely difficult to realise fully in imagination. Now, the theory of unrestricted individualism contends that all these complicated processes, in which the members of a community co-operate for the production and distribution of their wealth, can be most effectively carried on if each individual is left to act unfettered

by any restrictions of social authority. But the whole movement of industrial life contradicts this contention. It is true, as already remarked, that industrial success demanded the emancipation of industry from burdensome regulations and taxes which were never calculated to encourage productive enterprise. But restrictions of this nature must be distinguished from those which are simply the requirements of such concerted action as is necessary for efficiency in the production, and equity in the distribution, of wealth. For the progress of industrial life, with its ever-increasing complications, is rendering it more and more evidently impossible either for producers or for distributors to fulfil their social functions effectively without some mutual understanding of a more or less explicit kind. The disappearance of the small master-workman, the displacement of small industries carried on with the limited capital of individuals by vast enterprises requiring the united capital of joint-stock companies, the aggregation even of such companies in combinations vaster still :—these are perhaps the most striking features of the industrial era in which we live ; and they are evidence of the growing conviction among the industrial workers of the world, that their work can no longer be carried on effectively except by concerted action taking the place of unrestricted competition.

The extent to which concert in individual activity may be effectively carried forms of course an extremely complicated problem ; and many are deterred from facing the problem as they see lowering behind it the bugbear of Socialism. This name, with the offensive suggestions which it conveys to many minds, is at the same time so vague that it may well be avoided in the present discussion. It may be acknowledged that the name is sometimes unfortunately used to imply an extension of social interference with individual freedom, from which those do well to shrink who feel that the tyranny of society is already sufficiently galling, who feel that the hopes of humanity essentially depend on the development of individual responsibility and on the social order securing the free play of individual genius. But the establishment and enforcement of regulations to secure co-operation among industrial workers, and to avoid the enormous waste created by their present antagonisms,

would not in any way interfere with the real freedom of individuals. On the contrary, by guaranteeing, in a manner at present impossible, to every honest worker the fruit of his labors by providing him with the necessities and even the reasonable comforts and luxuries of our material civilisation, it may fairly be assumed that the great body of the industrial army would be delivered from the cruel oppression of the incessant anxieties connected with the present struggle for existence, and would thus win the required leisure for entering into the spiritual inheritance which humanity has already attained, while many an individual, whose genius would be crushed amid the struggles of industrial competition, might enjoy opportunities of a development that would enrich the intellectual and moral civilisation of the world.

Nor is it necessary to assume that, if concerted action take the place of competition, individual or private property should disappear from industrial life. So many of the social virtues are indissolubly connected with the use of property, that it remains extremely doubtful whether the moral evolution of the human race, even when it has touched its culminating point, will eliminate the institution from society. In the pleasant academical circle which Epicurus gathered about him in his garden in Athens, a proposal was made to introduce community of property among the members, but it seems to have been at once negatived by the master, as out of harmony with the highest social virtue, implying, as it would, distrust among friends in the friendly generosity of each other. It may be, therefore, that the evolution of society, instead of introducing a forcible, external, legal communism, will rather inspire the old concept of property with a new ideal, and that the feverish eagerness with which property is sought under the present system will disappear when larger property, like every superiority over others, will obtrude upon the moral consciousness of its owner, not so much the idea of a right, as rather that of an obligation,—not so much a claim to be ministered unto, but an obligation to minister,—an obligation to place his property and even his life, if necessary, at the service of his fellow-men.

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